Al-Siyāsah al-Sharʿiyyah

Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328)

About the Book

Al-Siyāsah al-Sharʿiyyah is a foundational work in Islamic political thought. Ibn Taymiyyah wrote it to address the practical problems of governance, justice, and abuse of power in Muslim societies.

The book argues that Islam is not limited to personal worship or moral teachings, but provides a comprehensive framework for **governing society, regulating political authority, and restraining rulers**. It rejects the idea that politics exists outside moral or legal accountability.

Rather than offering an idealized or utopian system, the book focuses on **real governance**, emphasizing justice, social stability, and public welfare.

Keywords

- Islamic Governance
- Political Authority
- Justice (*ʿAdl*)
- Public Interest (*Maṣlaḥah*)
- Accountability of Rulers
- Sharia and Politics
- Limits of Power
- Law Above Authority

Islamic Governance
Refers to the Islamic understanding of governance as a moral and legal responsibility. In this framework, ruling is not merely administrative power but a trust (*amānah*) aimed at establishing justice and protecting society.

Political Authority
In Ibn Taymiyyah's view, political authority is conditional and functional. It is legitimate only when it serves justice and public order, and it does not possess sacred or absolute status.

Justice (ʿAdl)
Justice is the central principle of governance. All political decisions, laws, and policies are evaluated based on their ability to establish fairness and prevent oppression.

Public Interest (Maṣlaḥah)
Public interest refers to policies and decisions that secure societal welfare and prevent harm. Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes that governance must respond to real social needs, not rigid formalism.

Accountability of Rulers
Rulers are fully accountable for their actions and decisions. They are subject to legal and moral scrutiny and cannot claim immunity based on religious or political status.

Sharia and Politics
Sharia is presented as a comprehensive legal framework that governs both private and public life. It directly regulates political authority and sets ethical and legal limits on governance.

Limits of Power
Political power is restricted by law and justice. Obedience to authority is required only when it does not lead to injustice, corruption, or violation of rights.

Law Above Authority
The ruler operates under the law and is not its source. Sharia functions as a higher legal authority that restrains political power and protects society from tyranny.

Summary

Ibn Taymiyyah explains that political authority in Islam is **conditional**, not sacred. A ruler is legitimate only if he possesses both the ability to govern and a commitment to justice.

The book presents Sharia as a **purpose-driven legal system** whose main objective is justice, not rigid literalism. Any policy that achieves justice and prevents harm is considered consistent with Islamic law, even if it is not explicitly mentioned in religious texts.

Rulers are not above the law and are fully accountable for their actions. Obedience to authority is required only when it does not involve injustice or oppression. Tyranny, corruption, and abuse of power invalidate moral legitimacy.

A central argument of the book is that **justice is the foundation of political stability**. States endure through fairness and collapse through oppression, regardless of religious identity. The work ultimately presents Islamic governance as ethical, realistic, and deeply concerned with protecting society from injustice.

Expanded Summary

In *Al-Siyāsah al-Sharʿiyyah*, Ibn Taymiyyah presents a comprehensive discussion of governance that moves beyond abstract political theory and addresses the **practical operation of power, law, and public order**. The book is concerned with how authority should function in real societies where corruption, injustice, and abuse of power exist.

At the foundation of the work is the principle that **political authority is not sacred or unconditional**. A ruler is legitimate only when he combines the ability to govern with justice. Power without justice leads to tyranny, while moral intention without effective authority leads to disorder. Governance therefore requires both strength and fairness.

Ibn Taymiyyah defines Sharia as a **purpose-driven legal system** whose primary objective is justice. Law exists to protect society, prevent harm, and secure public welfare. He strongly rejects rigid literalism when it produces injustice, arguing that policies which achieve justice and serve the public interest are consistent with Sharia even if they are not explicitly detailed in scriptural texts.

A significant portion of the book is devoted to the **administration of justice**. Judges are required to be independent, knowledgeable, and fair, and political rulers have no right to interfere in judicial decisions. The judiciary is presented as a central safeguard against tyranny and corruption.

The book also discusses **law enforcement and public order**, emphasizing that punishments and coercive measures are tools to protect society, not instruments of revenge or domination. Enforcement must be guided by proportionality, necessity, and fairness. Excessive harshness is condemned, as it produces social instability and resentment.

Ibn Taymiyyah pays particular attention to the concept of **public interest (maṣlaḥah)**. Governance decisions must consider real consequences and social conditions rather than abstract ideals. Policies that reduce harm, preserve stability, and protect rights are prioritized, even when they require flexibility in administrative practice.

Rulers, in this framework, are fully **accountable before God and society**. They are not above the law, and obedience to them is conditional upon justice. When authority becomes oppressive, corrupt, or destructive, it loses its moral legitimacy. However, Ibn Taymiyyah also warns against reckless rebellion that leads to greater harm, stressing the importance of balancing resistance to injustice with social stability.

A central argument repeated throughout the book is that **justice is the true foundation of political stability**. States endure not because of religious slogans, coercion, or fear, but because of fairness and the protection of rights. Conversely, oppression inevitably leads to decline and collapse, even when rulers claim religious legitimacy.

Overall, *Al-Siyāsah al-Sharʿiyyah* presents Islamic governance as a **realistic, ethical, and legally grounded system**. It integrates morality with political power, limits authority through law, and prioritizes justice and public welfare over ideology or symbolism. The book stands as a rejection of both authoritarian rule and value-neutral power politics.